

CPS REFORM WATCH

CPS Reform Watch describes the progress made in implementing the reforms outlined in Governor Janet Napolitano's Action Plan for Reform of Arizona's Child Protection System and included in legislation passed during the 2003 special session. This monthly bulletin also is available on the Department of Economic Security's website at www.de.state.az.us and on the Governor's website at www.governor.state.az.us.

June 2004

CPS Reform Status Report Released – One year ago, the Advisory Commission on Child Protective Services Reform issued their final report, providing detailed recommendations on how to improve the delivery of services to children and families from all state agencies and the community. In September 2003, Governor Napolitano responded with her *Action Plan for Reform of Arizona's Child Protection System* and with a subsequent special legislative session that set the legal and financial groundwork necessary to move forward with comprehensive reform. The Commission report set forth specific strategies for “reengineering” the system, focusing on improved outcomes for child safety, permanency, and child and family well-being. On June 30, 2004 – the one-year anniversary of the commission report – the Governor released the first comprehensive status report on CPS Reform. This status report provides: (1) a description of each action strategy; (2) the fundamental changes required to move forward with reform; (3) the status of those changes; and (4) the specific steps taken to date to implement them. The report also includes the next steps in Arizona's CPS reform efforts, which will help our state achieve the long-term goal of permanent systemic improvements. The report is available online at: www.governor.state.az.us.

Governor's Foster Youth Advisory Board – On Saturday, June 5, 2004, the foster youth advisory board met with Governor Napolitano. Seventeen youth board members, ranging from age 16 to 20, shared with the Governor more than 20 recommendations for improvements to the CPS system that included issues concerning siblings, independent living, peer mentoring, training, and post secondary education. The Governor's office and DES are considering each recommendation and will be reporting back to the youth board at a meeting to be scheduled in the fall. At that next meeting with the Governor, the advisory board decided to focus the discussion on group home life.

Second Increase to Family Foster Care Base Rate – On June 1, 2004, the second increase to the family foster care base rate was implemented. In the 2003 special legislative session, funding was provided to increase the daily reimbursement amount for family foster homes. This payment helps foster families with some of the costs associated with providing a safe, nurturing home to an abused or neglected child. The first half of the increase was implemented on January 1, 2004. In total, the daily reimbursement rates to foster families increased by \$7.50 per day per child.

Annie E. Casey Foundation Family-to-Family Program Conference – From June 2-4, a group consisting of CPS staff, a provider of services to abused and neglected children, a foster parent and a foster youth attended a conference of the Annie E. Casey's Family-to-Family programs. The Family to Family Initiative provides an opportunity for states and communities to re-conceptualize, redesign, and reconstruct their foster care system to achieve system-wide goals including:

1. To develop a network of family foster care that is more neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and located primarily in the communities in which the children live.
2. To reduce reliance on institutional or congregate care (in shelters, hospitals, psychiatric centers, correctional facilities, residential treatment programs, and group homes) -- by meeting the needs of many more of the children currently in those settings through relative or family foster care.
3. To increase the number and quality of foster families to meet projected needs.
4. To reunify children with their families as soon as that can safely be accomplished, based on the family's and children's needs -- not simply the system's time frames.
5. To decrease the overall number of children coming into out-of-home care and to reduce the lengths of stay of children in out-of-home care.
6. To better screen children being considered for removal from home, and to determine what services might be provided to safely preserve the family.
7. To involve foster families as team members in family reunification efforts.
8. To become a neighborhood resource for children and families and invest in the capacity of communities from which the foster care population comes.

The Foundation assists states and communities with a portion of the costs involved in both planning and implementing innovations in their systems of services for children and families, and provides technical assistance and consultation throughout the process. Arizona is being considered as a Family to Family site. During the month of July, representatives of the Annie E. Casey Foundation will make two visits to Arizona to assess our readiness to implement this important measure.

New Vehicles Purchased to Expand CPS Fleet – HB2024 passed during the 2003 special session appropriated funding to the Division to purchase 19 new vehicles to be used by the new staff positions that were part of the bill. In addition to investigating abuse reports, CPS staff also must coordinate follow-up services to children and families, including assisting with transportation needs for court dates, medical appointments, visitation, etc.

Recruitment of Additional CPS Staff and Stipends – DES staff aggressively recruit additional case managers. By June 30, DES met its goal of hiring the 104 new case managers funded through the 2003 special legislative session. For the 2005 fiscal year, the Division was appropriated funding to hire 50 additional case managers and related support and supervisory staff. Those case managers are expected to be hired by the end of September 2004.

The additional stipend for CPS investigators was implemented in June. Based on May 2004 caseload data, 115 CPS investigators statewide qualified for and were paid the stipend in June.

Jury Trials for Severance Hearings – There were two jury trials held in severance cases during the month of June; both juries returned verdicts terminating parental rights. Since February, there have been a total of 12 jury trials in severance cases – 1 in Phoenix, 9 in Tucson, 1 in Bullhead City, and 1 in Yuma. In 11 of the 12 cases, the juries terminated parental rights. This action frees the child for adoption to a safe, permanent home. In cases where

verdicts do not favor severing parental rights, the department will continue to work with the family with the goal of returning the child to the home when it is safe to do so. The child is not eligible to be adopted or placed in a permanent home unless additional grounds for severance arise and/or until further efforts to reunify the family fail and severance is eventually granted. There are 21 cases pending statewide in which parents have requested jury trials for severance hearings.

Expansion of the Open Hearings Pilot Program – In legislation passed during the special session, the Open Court Pilot was expanded to include all Arizona counties. Information on the process and documents used to implement the Maricopa pilot have been shared with judges in all counties. Staff from the Division of Children, Youth and Families and the Attorney General's office are working with the courts to ensure that the pilots are implemented and evaluated according to the statute.

So far, pilot programs have been started in Apache, Cochise, Coconino, Graham, Greenlee, Mohave, Navajo, Pima, Santa Cruz, Yavapai and Yuma counties; Gila and Pinal counties are expected to begin their pilot programs in July; La Paz County is slated to begin its program in August. Maricopa County also expanded its pilot program from two judges to four in the East Valley.

Implementation of the Governor's Action Plan, legislative changes that occurred during the 2003 Special Session, and other efforts to improve the state Child Protective Services system are coordinated through a statewide network of action teams. These teams include representatives of the Division of Children Youth and Families, as well as other Department of Economic Security staff from services such as Family Assistance, Employment Services and Developmental Disabilities. Most importantly, these teams include dozens of neighborhood leaders and community-based organizations working in partnership with state officials to keep kids safe and families strong.